

Wife  
at home  
SHORT  
PIECES

NAPLES

Wasd.out.of.the.closet.doc

2,300 words

7 November 2006

### **Out of the Closet: Into the Open Professionalism, power and the personal in development**

This is about three elephants in the room, so pervasive that they are often not seen.

But before I start, let me warn you. I am a lapsed natural scientist and historian, a failed manager of rural development, and now an undisciplined social scientist. I have contrived a reasonably sustainable livelihood by fishing in the gaps between disciplines. I am also vulnerable to glee when I think I have found a case of professional error. I have also often been wrong in the past while believing that I was right. So please use your own judgement as I am sure you will about whether what follows is valid and makes sense.

The three elephants are professionalism, power and the personal dimension development. The idea I want to float is that these are important but usually not seen or analysed; and that they are responsible for many of the errors and failures to do better in development

#### **Normal professionalism**

This is the ideas, values, methods, behaviours relationships and mindsets that are prevalent and dominant in professions and disciplines.

I am going to use the word paradigm to mean the ways in which these interlock and support each other, as in figure 1

*Figure 1 here*

The question is: in development do we have a tension between two paradigms – one associated with things and one associated with people, as sketched in figure 2? Much development activity began on the things side dominated by engineers and economists – and naturally so because of the reconstruction of Europe after the second world war, and the emphasise on industrialisation and import substitution in early development theory and practice.

*Figure 2 here*

Are we engaged in a struggle in development practice of trying to shift professions, organisations and individuals from the things side more to the people side? We still need engineers and economists to do their thing and to do it well, but do we need all disciplines and professions to be more on the people side?

Does the relative status of professions reflect and reinforce the things paradigm? Micro surgery, biotechnology, computer sciences and small particle physics are high status, dealing with things, or in the case of surgery with people anaesthetised to become like things, and working in highly controlled and controllable conditions; while nurses and midwives, agricultural extensionists and social workers are low status, dealing with people in all their complexity, diversity and uncontrollability. And there are other correlates as in figure 3.

*Figure 3 here*

The things side is reinforced by normal bureaucracy with its tendency to centralise, standardise and simplify.

Then we can wonder about the role of universities and colleges in all this. Do they reproduce normal professionalism? Thomas Kuhn, in his classic The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, wrote about normal science, which he characterised as

“a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into conceptual boxes supplied by professional education”

In my field of participation, and in some other fields of development, university faculty are among the last to learn and change. As S. Mumtaz Begum's paper points out for India, faculty can be so busy meeting the demands of teaching that they have little time for research. And even when they do research, one might add, they tend to go for topics that be turned easily and efficiently into published papers with tables and statistics, often to the neglect of what is new, exciting, non-quantifiable and important. Worse, through repetition in lectures they embed whatever they teach in their mindsets and so make it even harder for them to learn and keep up to date with rapid change. Nor are they likely to be contradicted by compliant students who do not know better, or if they do, prudently keep quiet. So largely unrecognised and unacknowledged, but very damagingly, university lecturing disables those who lecture. And textbooks, always by definition out of date by the time they have been written and published, compound these disabilities in fields where change is fast, as it is in sustainable development.

### **Power**

Many social relations can be seen as between uppers and lowers, in which uppers are dominant and lowers subordinate. Gender relations are usually a case in point. Parents and children are another. We say that all power deceives. When we were children how many of us at some time lied to our parents? Hid things from them? And how many of our children at times lie to us? And hide things from us? Power is then a disability too.

We can ask: Whose reality counts? That of uppers or that of lowers?

*Figure 4 here*

---

Are reversals then needed as in figure 5?

*Figure 5 here*

When we pursue this question through to perceptions of realities, and link this with the things paradigm and high status in professions, do we find a contrast between the realities constructed by professionals and those experienced by poor people, as in figure 6?

*Figure 6 here*

### **The Personal Dimension**

The personal dimension is so self-evidently central to what happens in development that it is almost embarrassing to draw attention to it. I am relieved and pleased therefore that it is prominent in the first article in the conference volume, by Mago William Maila. He is concerned with the why, what and how of our practice and

stresses the importance of “continuous informed reflexive action-in-practice”. Do we need to pay much more attention to this, both among development professionals generally and for ourselves personally?

One lens through which to see this is what happens in a normal “successful” career, as in figure 7.

*Figure 7 here*

I am in no position to talk, but is it the case that one major problem we have is old men who are out of touch and out of date, who pontificate or who exercise power? You can see them, and hear them, on television. I have caught myself in an animated discussion with a former colleague about the agriculture of a district in Kenya in which I realised with a shock that we were talking of the conditions we had known 25 years earlier as though it was the present; and in the meantime many changes had occurred with population probably nearly doubling, and the tree cover increasing by a factor of 10 or more.

Ego is another pervasive personal problem, and the ownership, possessiveness, assertiveness, arrogance, and inability to learn and more so to unlearn, that so often go with it.

#### **Errors and failures**

There have been many well known examples of past errors and failures: in science, the persecution of Galileo here in Italy; the ridiculing of Alfred Wegener for his theory of continental drift; and coming closer to contemporary development the way the intravenous Vitamin C cure for polio (five years before the Salk vaccine) was ignored; the rubbishing of the idea that arsenic poisoning could come from groundwater in Bangladesh. In matters of development policy, we have the impoverishing and murderous impacts on poor people of policies of structural adjustment...

But these are not just phenomena of the past. Let me mention four errors and failures to learn that are hot contemporary topics. My confessed biases will show through. But I believe what follows to be true:

- 
- *1. The System of Rice Intensification.* This does everything “wrong” and achieves sharp rises in yield, sustainably it seems— indeed it seems with yields rising year on year. Productivity per unit land often doubles or more, and productivity per unit water rises even more. The science is largely understood. Treated well, transplanted early and kindly without the normal trauma, give plenty of space, with its roots allowed air, the rice plant responds handsomely. The technology is spreading fast in China, India and numerous other countries. But IRRI (the International Rice Research Institute) has scientists, or has had scientists (they may have changed by now) who have been in a state of denial, and have even asserted that some of the yields reported have been over the biological maximum
  - *The Green Revolution in Africa.* The controlled flat well serviced irrigated conditions of Northwest India are extremely rare in Africa, where their opposites prevail. This did not deter Norman Borlaug and the Sasakawa Global 2000 programme from trying to introduce a Northwest Indian style green revolution in country after African country. We do not seem to hear about this any more.

- *The Millennium Village Programme (MVP)* introduced in a very few villages in Africa (not more, I believe, than 12) is repeating the “island of salvation” approach which has repeatedly failed or failed to spread – as with the village settlement predecessors of *ujamaa* in Tanzania, with the Integrated Rural Development Projects of the World Bank in the 1970s and 1980s, with Sukhomajri in India... The MVP is based on the view that the solutions are known and all that is needed is a big push. If the lessons of the past are relevant, the outcomes are unfortunately likely to be deeply disappointing, if not tragic.
- *Community-Led Total Sanitation* is a participatory approach evolved in Bangladesh in which communities conduct their own analysis of open defaecation and often decide to end it totally. This presents vast potential towards achieving the MDGs, but it requires turning almost everything that is “normal” on its head: donors have to make small, not large grants; bureaucratic targets have to be avoided; professional engineering standards (for latrine construction) have to be abandoned; hardware subsidies have to be eliminated; and the philanthropic reflex – we must make special provision for the poorest – has to be resisted (communities help their poor people). These changes have been too much for many development professionals (in NGOs as well as Governments and aid agencies), and the spread of CLTS has in consequence been inhibited.

In these examples we see, variously,

- Rejection, denial and even ridicule
- Failure to see and recognise what is happening
- Failure to learn from past experiences
- Failure to see and make the changes needed in policy and practice

To overcome these requires, again variously, resolute reorientations, reversals of direction and recognition of realities which challenge mindsets and sometimes egos and institutional interests. These are contexts in which normal professionalism, power and ego are disabilities: they get in the way. They tend to serve the interests of the well-off and the powerful. All too often, they do not serve the interests of poor and marginalised people.

### **An agenda for action**

A great many suggestions could be made. You will have many ideas. Here are a few from me:

#### ***Professional***

- Journal articles to include, after the abstract, as a standard requirement, a personal statement of predispositions, biases and the like, to enable readers to know where the author is coming from
- Triangulate methods
- Ask what lessons have been learnt in the past before launching out on new programmes
- Ask what is not covered or not studied and why, and compensate for this – microenvironments, rooting systems, soil biota, minilivestock (frogs, rodents, spiders, locusts, termites, earthworms... an area opened up by Maurizio Paoletti of the University of Padua), home gardens.....and in the context of this conference climate change (mentioned by Allam Ahmed in his introduction, though), insecurity....

- Redefine much of good science to include the people paradigm, checking on the relevance of chaos, complexity and emergence theory. Attitude and behaviour change is a pervasive priority for much good science, and has to some extent occurred among agricultural scientists.

### **Power**

- Transform power relationships, recognising that for those with power over to empower those over whom they have power can often be a win-win – with less stress, more sustainability, enhanced social justice and equity, better social relations.....The four types of power – power over, power to (or agency), power with (collective power) and power within (self-confidence) help to see how this can be facilitated and occur, as in figure 8

*Figure 8 here*

### **The Personal**

- Evolve pedagogies for the powerful, the privileged, the non-oppressed (with apologies to Paulo Freire). These can include immersions where poor communities host an outsider
- Provide for reflection by professionals, including self-critical epistemological awareness – trying to be aware of one's predispositions, mindset, ways of seeing things and learning, and tendencies towards error (like asserting without sources or evidence, as in much of what I am saying)

### **And tertiary education**

The challenge here is to recognise and deal with all three elephants - professionalism, power, and personal. Many dimensions are relevant. Striving to keep up to date is an obvious one. Less obvious is transforming the methods and approaches for teaching and learning. There are now new ways of enabling students to learn, including participatory workshops for large (e.g. 40-100) students. Traditional didactic methods like lecturing model and transfer hierarchy and top-down attitudes and behaviours, embedding these in students. But if students are to be participatory later in life, they need to learn and become comfortable with participatory practices and style in university. [Anyone is interested in this, please email to [d.donlan@ids.ac.uk](mailto:d.donlan@ids.ac.uk) and ask for the paper on participatory workshops with large numbers, and the notes on carousel. We hope to have an e conversation on this soon].

### **So to conclude..**

Reversals, open systems, empowering others....and the other orientations and participatory behaviours need not threaten. To the contrary, they can be and often are liberating, fulfilling and fun. They can be enjoyed.

That said, I am embarrassed by what I shall end with. Let me explain. I am English. There is one capability for which the English can claim to be leaders in our world. It is not rugby, or soccer, or cricket, or tennis, or golf, but hypocrisy. So in ending with a challenge from Gandhi which I do not meet in my own life, I ask you to be charitable and see this as a patriotic affirmation of my national culture.

Gandhi said:

"We must become the change we wish to see in the world"

Naples 6 November 2006

Robert Chambers

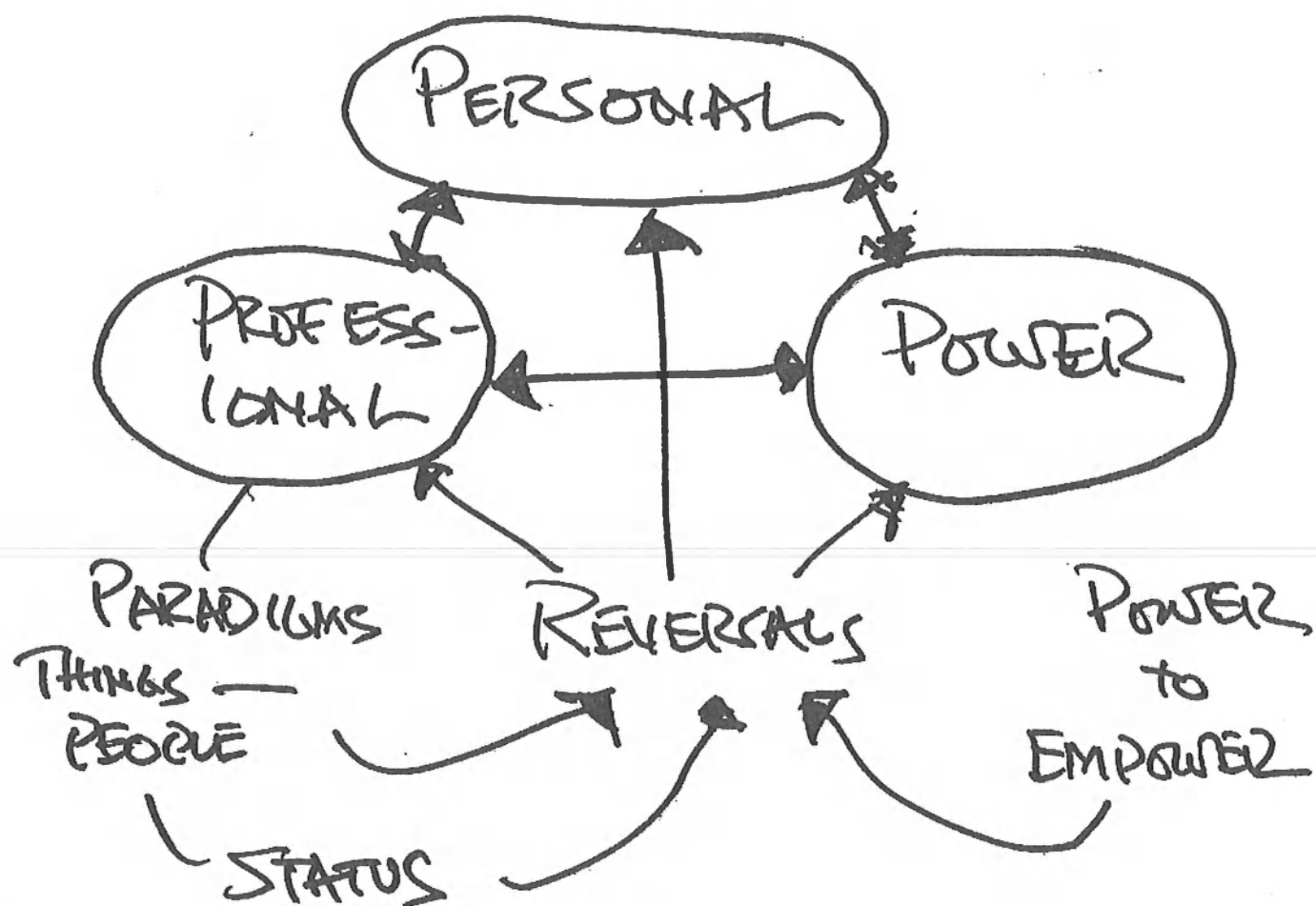
# OUT OF THE CLOSET: INTO THE OPEN

## PROFESSIONALISM

### POWER AND THE PERSONAL IN DEVELOPMENT

---

THREE ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM



---

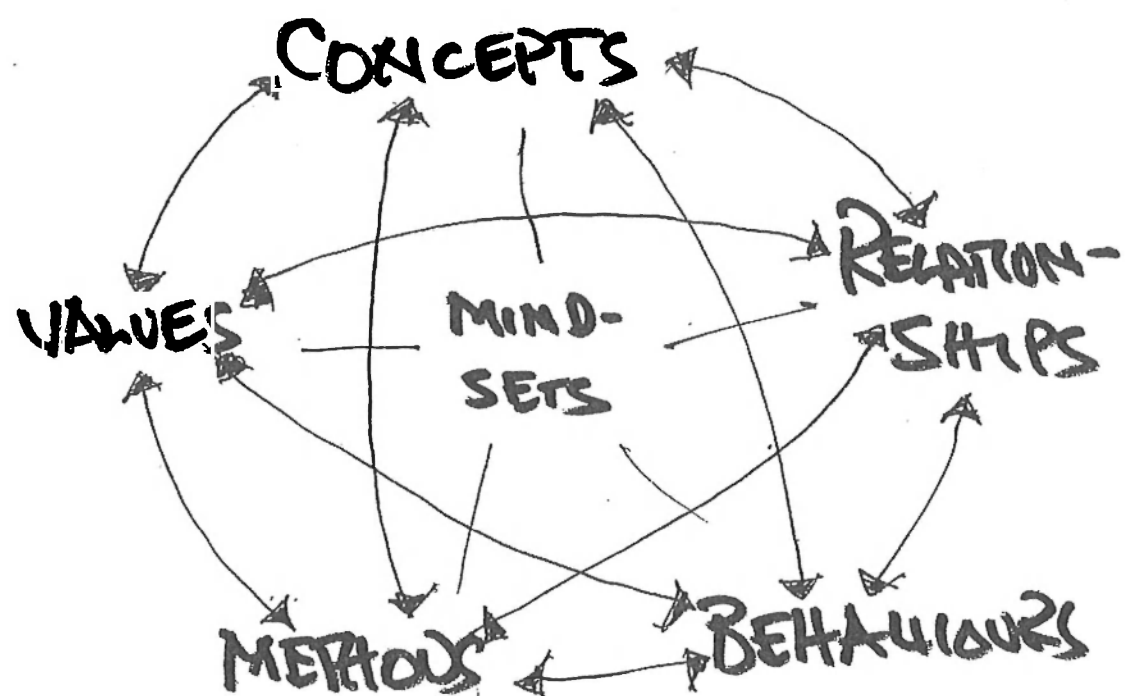
WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

NAPLES

6-8 NOVEMBER 2006

## FIGURE 1. PARADIGM



Mutually reinforcing concepts, values, methods, behaviours and relationships all supporting and being supported by mindsets

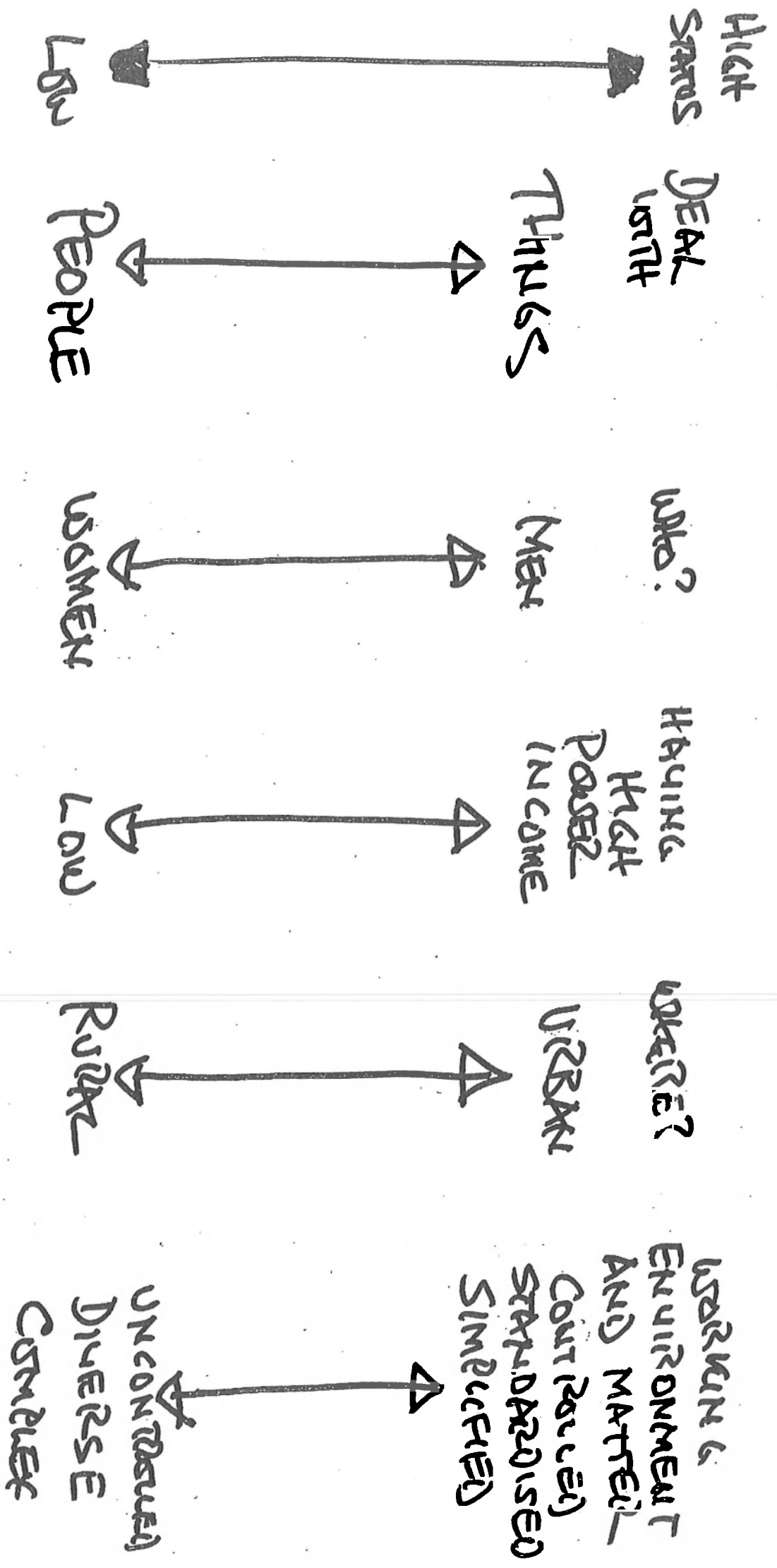


# THE BIG, BIG SHIFTS IN MUCH DEVELOPMENT THINKING AND PRACTICE!

NOT EITHER - OR  
- WE NEED BOTH -  
BUT A BETTER BALANCE

	THINGS	→	PEOPLE
ORIENTATION, PLANNING AND ACTION	TOP-DOWN CENTRALISED STANDARDISED CONTROLLING	→	BOTTOM-UP DECENTRALISED DIVERSE DEMOCRATIC
KEY WORDS	PLANNING DESIGN BLUEPRINT	→	PARTICIPATION EMERGENCE PROCESS
GOALS	PRESET, FIXED	→	EVOLVING
"OUR"/UPPERS ROLES SEEN AS	TEACHER BENEFACITOR	→	FACILITATOR CONVENOR, CATALYST
"THEY"/LOWERS ARE SEEN AS	BENEFICIARIES RECIPIENTS	→	ACTORS RIGHT-HOLDERS
ACCOUNTABILITY	UPWARDS	→	DOWNWARDS
OUTPUTS	INFRASTRUCTURE REPORTS	→	CAPABILITIES EMPOWERMENT
KEY PROFESSIONS	ENGINEERS ECONOMISTS	→	ALL!
MINDSETS, METHODS, APPROACHES	LINEAR REDUCTIONIST MEASUREMENT	→	ITERATIVE SYSTEMS JUDGEMENT
POVERTY SEEN AS	INCOME-POVERTY	→	MULTI-DIMENSIONAL
TYPICAL PROCEDURE	LOGFRAME	→	PARTICIPATORY DESIGN AND DELIVERY

# SOME CORRELATES OF PROFESSIONAL STATUS



WHOSE REALITY COUNTS?

WHOSE PRIORITIES?

WHOSE KNOWLEDGE?

WHOSE APPRAISAL?

WHOSE PLANNING?

WHOSE ACTION?

WHOSE INDICATORS?

WHOSE M AND E?

"OURS" OR "THEIRS"

AND WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE TO WHOM?

---

WHOSE PRIORITIES?

WHOSE CONCEPTS?

WHOSE CATEGORIES?

WHOSE ANALYSIS?

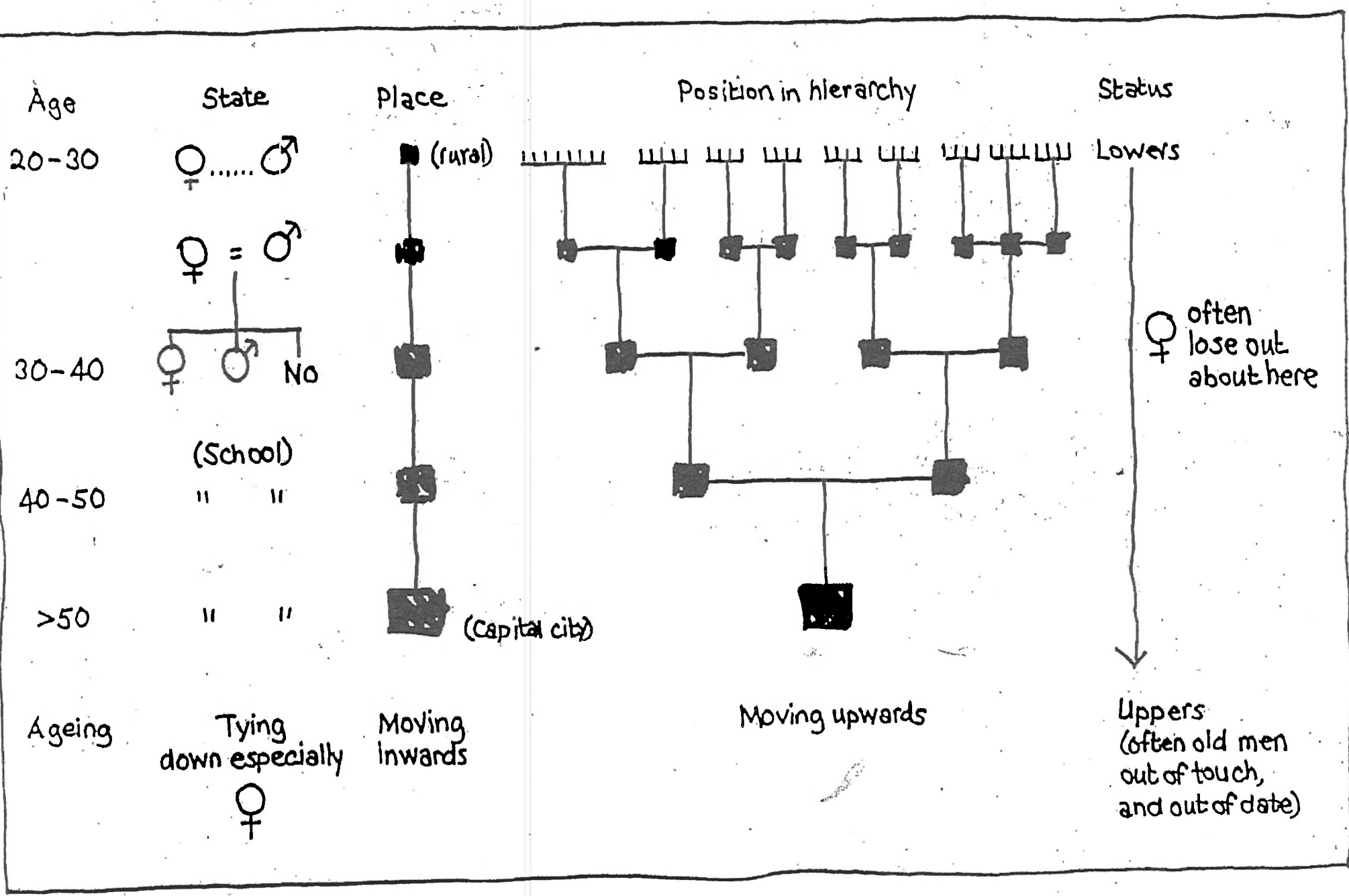
## REVERSALS OF THE NORMAL

	NORMAL TENDENCIES	NEEDED REVERSALS
Social/Professional Power	Things First Men before Women Uppers and Lowers Transfer of Reality Reductionist, Simple	People First Women before Men Lowers Empowered Multiple Realities Holistic, Complex
Bureaucratic	Centralise Standardise Control	Decentralise Diversify Democratise
Careers and Movements	Tying Down Inwards Upwards	Releasing Outwards Downwards
Modes of Learning and Action	Extractive By Uppers Questionnaire surveys	Empowering By Lowers Participatory Learning Methods
<p>The Reversals are to offset biases They are not absolute but need much weight to achieve balance.</p>		

# COMMON CONTRASTING TENDENCIES IN REALITIES

PROFESSIONALS' (CONSTRUCTED)	POOR PEOPLE'S (EXPERIENCED)
UNIVERSAL	LOCAL, SPECIFIC
SIMPLIFIED	COMPLEX
STANDARDISED	DIVERSE
REDUCTIONIST	SYSTEMS
CONTROLLABLE	UNCONTROLLABLE
MEASURABLE	UNMEASURED
EXPRESSED AND DESCRIBED THROUGH	
QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS	PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES
AS	
INCOME-POVERTY	MULTI-DIMENSIONAL DEPRIVATION
EMPLOYMENT, JOBS	LIVELIHOOD

# NORMAL "SUCCESSFUL" CAREERS



# TYPES AND PATHWAYS OF POWER

